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Mellon family's legacy lives on

Even as the longtime local bank sheds the name, its influence is still felt in region

June 30, 2007 8:00 PM

By Dan Fitzpatrick Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Chris Mellon, a 49-year-old descendant of Gulf Oil co-founder William Larimer Mellon, returned to southwestern Pennsylvania last year after two decades of defense intelligence work in Washington, D.C.

"I'm delighted to be getting more and more involved in the area," said Mr. Mellon, who now lives in Ligonier, longtime home to dozens of Mellon kin.

His involvements include serving on the board of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, opening business advisory firm Mellon Strategic Consulting LLC, and aiding a Ligonier startup venture, Powercast, which he and other Mellons backed with family money.

Powercast's technology uses radio waves to transmit electricity through the air, and Mr. Mellon sees the budding business as part of a long tradition of energy entrepreneurship in Western Pennsylvania, from the discovery of oil by Edwin Drake to the development of nuclear power by Westinghouse Electric.

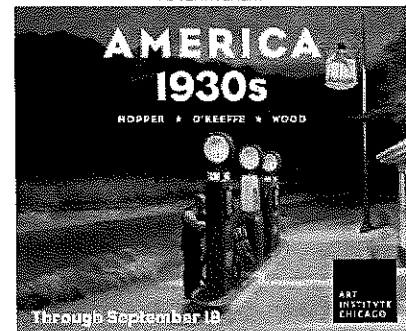
The case of Powercast also is a reminder that the Mellon family is still a potent force in southwestern Pennsylvania, even as the family's namesake institution shifts its headquarters out of Pittsburgh after 138 years.

Today, Mellon Financial Corp. officially merges with The Bank of New York, and tomorrow its chief executive officer will ring the opening bell of the New York Stock Exchange marking the creation of The Bank of New York Mellon Corp., a new company based across the street from the NYSE in Lower Manhattan.

The \$16.5 billion merger severs the last family ties to the financial services company originally founded by "Judge" Thomas Mellon, as Seward Prosser Mellon departs from the board after 35 years.

"I had been planning to retire from the Mellon board in the near future," Seward Prosser Mellon said in a statement released by the company, "so when we met to consider which members would become part of the new board, I requested that I not be considered so that I could begin that retirement now."

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It looks as if his retirement will play out in southwestern Pennsylvania. Seward Prosser Mellon, a philanthropist, is one of more than 30 Mellon family members who still have homes or some measure of civic involvement in the region, according to interviews with family members and people close to the family.

They range from philanthropists and venture capitalists to an attorney, a photographer and the owners of a barge company, a real estate company, a trucking company, a newspaper and an upscale automobile dealership, along with some who sit on local nonprofit boards and one 88-year-old who still remembers "Uncle Andy" Mellon smoking his cigars.

As one person close to the family said, "The fact that the bank is leaving does not mean the family is leaving."

The 'bank' branch

To understand the Mellons of today, you need to understand their origins. There are four branches of the family, tracing back to the mid-1850s with the sons of Thomas Mellon and Sarah Jane Negley. Thomas Mellon was a lawyer, judge and banker, founding Mellon precursor T. Mellon & Sons in 1869.

The most prominent son, the one most like his father, was Andrew Mellon, who became a banker and venture capitalist before he became U.S. Treasury Secretary. This is the family line that has the weakest connections to southwestern Pennsylvania; people interviewed for this story could not place any of Andrew Mellon's descendants in the Pittsburgh area.

It was Andrew and his brother Richard Beatty Mellon who took pre-World War I investment risks on coal, steel, aluminum, oil pipelines, railroads -- thus supporting Pittsburgh's rise as an industrial power and creating an immense amount of wealth for the family.

The Richard Beatty line remains strong here. His son Richard King Mellon ran the family's banking interests in the middle part of the 20th century and was a strong civic figure who helped Pittsburgh rebuild after World War II.

Richard King Mellon's adopted children and grandchildren all remain connected to the Pittsburgh area in one way or another -- the link being the \$2 billion Richard King Mellon Foundation, one of the largest philanthropic groups in the country and provider of \$92 million in grants last year, many to Pittsburgh-area causes.

Two of Richard King Mellon's children and seven of eight grandchildren are now serving on the foundation's board, the latest addition being the appointment last year of Bruce Henderson, son of Cassandra Milbury (Cassandra King Mellon), who lives in Ligonier. The only grandchild and board member who does not have a home in the Pittsburgh area is Alison Byers.

Two of the eight grandchildren also run businesses in the Pittsburgh area -- Armour Mellon, son of foundation Chairman Richard Mellon, owns Glenn Cook Real Estate Company in Ligonier, and Richard Mellon's other son, Richard, owns a trucking company, R.A.M. Transit in Saxonburg.

Another well-known member of the Richard Beatty branch is Richard Mellon Scaife, who publishes the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review and is the chairman of several foundations, including the Sarah Scaife Foundation and the Allegheny Foundation. His mother was Sarah Cordelia Mellon, the daughter of Richard Beatty Mellon.

There was a time when Mr. Scaife had a direct connection to the family institution; he was a member of Mellon Financial's board back when it was Mellon Bank from 1958 to 1979. "I'm sad to see Mellon leave town," the publisher told his own newspaper recently. But "life goes on, time marches on."

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Mr. Scaife had two children, and one of them, David, still lives in Shadyside. The 41-year-old is the chairman of DSF Charitable Foundation. In 2000 he purchased a Shadyside nightclub and turned it into a car museum and dealer of Porsches and Spyders called Auto Palace. David Scaife also invests some of his own money in local businesses, acting as a venture capitalist.

Asked about the presence of the Mellon family in Pittsburgh, he said, "It's obviously waning to a certain degree...." At the same time, he added, "you still do have quite a few Mellons living in Southwestern Pennsylvania" and "I still have an affinity for Pittsburgh."

The 'oil' branch

Another large source of Mellon wealth is the legacy of Gulf Oil, a company established in 1907 with help from Andrew and Richard Beatty Mellon, the two brothers in charge of the banking enterprise.

A key member of that Gulf team was co-founder William Larimer Mellon, the son of James Ross Mellon and nephew of Andrew and Richard Beatty. Gulf became one of the world's largest companies before being purchased by Chevron in 1984. Before his death in 1949, William Larimer Mellon proclaimed Gulf to be "so big I have lost track of it."

Gulf is no longer in Pittsburgh, but at least 11 descendants of William Larimer Mellon remain with homes or board affiliations. They include Jim Walton, vice chair of The Heinz Endowments and former president of the Carnegie Institute; Mr. Walton's son Joe, interim president of the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh Foundation; Peter Stephaich, partial owner of Campbell Transportation Co., a barge operator in Charleroi; Joshua Whetzel III, a board member of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy; and Alexander Laughlin, a supporter and board member of the Laughlin Center in Sewickley.

Among family members from this branch, "there seems to be an appreciation for the area," said Chris Mellon, the great-grandson of William Larimer Mellon.

"There is still a connection."

The 'Thomas' branch

The least-known collection of Mellons still in the Pittsburgh area are the descendants of Thomas A. Mellon, the eldest son of "Judge" Thomas Mellon. They include an attorney in the North Hills, a photographer in the Ligonier area and a former director of Fallingwater, the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed house in Somerset County.

Some claim they have little in common with other branches of the family. "We certainly don't have any Mellon money at all," said 88-year old Samuel McClung III, who lives in a retirement home in Oakmont and is the grandson of Thomas A. Mellon. Mr. McClung remembers "Uncle Andy" -- Andrew Mellon -- coming over to his mother's house on Murray Hill Avenue to smoke cigars, and the childhood fear of being kidnapped because of his family affiliation.

For 30 years Mr. McClung owned the Universal Metal Molding Co. in Oakmont, but now he is retired, though still lively. Asked about the civic power once belonging to the Mellons, he said, "I don't think the Mellon influence has been all that great for the last 20 to 30 to 40 years. I think it gradually faded away."

Stephen Stone III agrees with that assessment. The great-grandson of Thomas A. Mellon lives in Monroeville and works as East Coast regional manager for a Portland, Ore., inventory verification firm. Mr. Stone never left the area, even for a few years. It is his belief, though, that "the power and influence of the old Mellon name has certainly lost the punch that it's had in years past."

Thomas Schmidt, 67, of Squirrel Hill, is one descendant of Thomas A. Mellon who maintains friendships across other branches of the family and argues that the family influence remains strong

locally. His father, Adolph Schmidt, worked for Paul Mellon, the son of U.S. Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon. His mother, Helen, still lives in Ligonier.

The director of Fallingwater from 1975 to 1996, Mr. Schmidt still serves on a number of boards, from the National Aviary to the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy. While it is true, he said, that the family is now "scattered" across all parts of the country, the Mellons who remain have done a "huge amount for Western Pennsylvania."



♦ The Mellon Family Tree, in pdf format



Richard King Mellon



Richard Mellon Scaife



Seward Prosser Mellon




Armour Mellon



David Scaife

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